Land Revenue Administration in Purnea before 1765

Madaneshwar Mishra

(i) Jurisdiction of Purnea

According to the Fifth Report, Saif Khan was the first and the most famous of the governors of Purnea under the later Mughals. He ruled Purnea almost as a despotic ruler from 1722 to 1752.[1] Just on the eve of Saif Khan's appointment as faujdar[2] or military commander as well as the revenue collector of Purnea, it was bounded on the west by the river Kośi which flowed through a little west of the present Purnea town and proceeding southward fell into the Gaṅgā some where near Karhagola. The northern boundary was some 14 miles from the present town of Purnea which is proved by the existence of a frontier fort and a village called 'Sīmā' even to this day near Jalalgarh. From Jalalgarh the boundary ran eastward passing a little north of the junction of the 'Mahananda' and 'Kankai' rivers and then to the south to a point where the present pargana of Suryapur of Purnea bordered the district of Dinajpur.[3] Saif Khan after his appointment, extended the jurisdiction of Purnea towards the west by one-third through his conquests of the portions west of the river Kośi in 1732 and almost an equal area towards the north on the side of Morang, i.e. on the frontiers of Nepal.[4] Jurisdiction of Purnea thus covered an area of 5119 square miles,[5] i.e. a little more than what it was in 1950. The area beyond the river Kośi which was conquered by Saif Khan in 1732 was under the control of Bir Sah and his son and included Parganas Gondwara, Bhawanipur, Birnagar, Nathpur and Dhaphar and the major portion of this area together was known as pargana Dharmpur and was a part of Bihar under Sarkar

1 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 336.
2 Fauj = army, dar = holder.
3 W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, vol. XV, p. 222.
4 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 336.
5 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 335.

Monghyr.[6] Since Saif Khan's conquest this portion continued to be under the jurisdiction of Purnea. The following table gives an idea of the increase in the area of Purnea in Saif Khan's regime—

Table 1

The area of Purnea between 1722 & 1752

Year	*Area in square miles*	*How acquired*
1722	1706	Original jurisdication
1732	1706	Additions made by conquest
1732 to 1752	1707	—do—
Total	51119	

Source—Based on Fifth Report, vol. II, pp. 232 & 386.

Saif Khan served in Purnea till his death under successive viceroyalties of Murshid Kuli, Shujauddin and Aliverdi Khan. After his death, the government wasbestowed in rapid succession on Muhammad Abed and Bahadur Khan. After Bahadur Khan's brief administration, Saiyad Ahmad Khan (nephew and son-in-law of Aliverdi Khan) became the faujdar of Purnea. After his death in 1756, he was succeeded by his son Shaukat Jang who after only nine months' rule was killed in a battle with Sirajuddowla at 'Baldiabari' near Manihari. Between 1757 and 1765 the following faujdars ruled Purnea:-

Rai Nekraj Khan, Hazir Ali Khan, Khadim Hossain Khan, Allah Kuli Khan, Sher Ali Khan, Sipahidar Jang, Raja Suchet Rai and Raziuddin Muhammad Khan.[7]

The area and jurisdiction of Purnea with certain adjustments continued to be as before even under their successive administration. Thus on the eve of Diwani Purnea was constituted of portions of the present states of Bengal and Bihar both.

6 Ibid, p. 337.

7 W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, vol. XV, pp. 222-225.

The following list gives the Pargana-wise division of Purnea separately under Bihar and Bengal in 1765 :—

Pargana	*Sarkar*	*Suba*
1. Haveli Purnea		
2. Sripur Dulmalpur		
3. Sultanpur	Purnea	Bengal
4. Katihar		
5. Kadwa		
6. Asja		
7. Teera Khardah		
1. Badaur		
2. Haveli Tajpur		
3. Kolraha		
4. Kumaripur		
5. Dilawarpur	Tajpur	Bengal
6. Surjapur		
7. Bhaura		
8. Bahadurpur		
9. Deorhi Khawaspur		
1. Gondwara		
2. Bhawanipur		
3. Birnagar	Monghyr	Bihar
4. Nathpur		
5. Dhaphar		

Source :—Fifth Report, vol. II, pp. 337–338.

Let us now find out the revenue assessment of Purnea in pre-1765 period.

(ii) Revenue Assessments

According to Grant's Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Finances of Bengal, the two divisions of Purnea, i.e. Sarkar Purnea and Sarkar Tajpur, were assessed at Rs. 1,60,219 and Rs. 1,62,096 respectively according to Todar Mal's assessment of 1582[8] and Pargana Dharmpur of Sarkar Monghyr

8 Fifth Report, vol. II, Appendix No. 4.

was assessed at Rs. 1,00,000.[9] The total assessment of these three Sarkars came to Rs. 4,22,315. But since the time of Tordar Mal, there have been so many changes in the boundary of the district that any attempt for comparison with his assessment with a later period will only lead to confusion.

Saif Khan, after his appointment as faujdar and amil of Purnea extended his jurisdiction towards the west and added an equal area to his original jurisdiction and further annexed to his territory about the same area by extending the northern boundary. Thus the additions made by him were about double the area of his original jurisdiction. In 1722, Purnea was assessed at Rs. 2,78,830. Hunter says that financial reforms made by Murshid Quli Khan were not extended to Purnea. As a frontier military district, the greater portion of its land was assigned as 'jagir' for the maintenance of the faujdar and his troops. During the time of Murshid Quli Khan, the Khalsa, under the pargana denomination of Sripur Dalmalpur, yielded Rs. 2,78,830 and out of this amount Rs. 1,80,166 was assigned to Saif Khan as a 'rakmi' jagir which was secured by a 'sanad' or grant.[10] Shujauddin Khan, Nawab of Bengal redistributed the lands of Purnea into a revenue-paying portion valued at Rs. 2,14,854 and a jagir portion, valued at Rs. 1,29,374[11]. He also added some 'abwabs' and the total assessment came to Rs. 5,61,857.[12] It is to be noted that after Todar Mal's assessment, Murshid Kuli Khan, the subedar of Bengal was the first to levy additional impositions and this was followed by his successors—Shujauddin Khan, Aliverdi Khan and Mir Kasim.[13] According to Grant's estimates, the assessment of Purnea in 1757 was Rs. 3,44,229 with an addition of Rs. 3,17,098 as 'abwab' and thus the total assessment including abwab was Rs. 6,61,327.[14] Thus 'abwabs' were responsible for about 50 percent of the total gross assessment. He also gives details of the abwabs which were as follows :—

9 Ibid, p. 232.

10 W.W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, vol. XV, p. 387.

11 Ibid, p. 388.

12 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 232.

13 Ibid, p. 7.

14 Ibid, p. 336.

Table 2

'Abwabs' realised in Purnea in 1757 by the Provincial Government

Type of Abwab		*Amount in Rs.*
(1) Khas Navisi	—	2,373
(2) Zar Mathout	—	256
(3) Faujdary	—	2,90,451
(4) Chouth Maratha	—	24,018
Total	—	3,17,098

Source : Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 337.

These were the 'abwabs' levied by Murshidabad Government and many more were levied by the faujdar. Mir Kasim, in about 1760, being pressed for money got the resources of Purnea examined and his gross assessment of Purnea came to Rs. 21,09,415. Out of this sum, Rs. 74,134 was the collection charge to be spent over zamindars, kanungoes and makdums; Rs. 56,071 for the maintenance of frontier garrisons and Rs. 33,805 for state charity (yearly and daily) and thus after deducting these charges which came to Rs. 1,64,010 the net assessment was at Rs. 1,945,405.[15] The percentage of charges came to 8. Mir Kasim's examination of the resources of Purnea also reveals the huge amounts appropriated by the former faujdars of Purnea. Grant says that Mir Kasim completed a regular Hustobud[16] and found that Rs. 14,72,845 was the concealed amount.[17] Apart from this, revenues received from market places, taxes, duties and licenses etc. which included 'sair duties'[18] were not transmitted to the provincial treasury in Purnea district, the 'gunj'[19] of Nawabgunj on the confluence of

15 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 338.

16 What is and what was.

17 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 337.

18 Remaining or all other sources of revenue accruing to the Government, in addition to the land-tax, from a variety of imposts, as customs, transit duties, licenses, fees etc.

19 Market place.

the Mahananda and the Ganges alone yielded a duty of Rs. 1,18,793.[20] In 1764 Nand Kumar reduced the net revenue of Purnea as ascertained by Mir Kasim at Rs. 19,45,405 to Rs. 17,88,174 by re-introducing the allowed mufassil charges (cost of collection etc.) and the revenue was fixed at less than what it ought to have been. This is called by Grant 'native chicanery' of the Hindustani financers who enrich themselves by cheating the Government.[21] In 1765 at the time of the acquisition of Diwani, Rs. 17,88,173 was accepted as the gross revenue assessment of Purnea, Rs. 3,65,637 was the cost of collection and thus the net assessment was Rs. 14,22,536.[22]

The following Table shows the gross revenue assessment of Purnea and also the cost of collection and other charges :—

Table 3

Revenue Assessment of Purnea, 1722–1765

Year	Gross assessment in Rs.	Charges including cost of collection in Rs.	Net Assessment in Rs.
1722	2,78,830	1,80,166	98,664
1728	2,78,940	1,80,166	98,774
1739	3,44,288	N.A.	N.A.
1757	6,61,327	N.A.	N.A.
1763	21,09,415	1,64,010	19,45,405
1764	19,45,405	1,57,231	17,88,174
1765	17,88,173	3,65,637	14,22,536

Sources: (1) Based on Final Report on Survey and Settlement Operation (Purnea), p. 16 (1908).

(2) Fifth Report, vol. II, pp. 232, 336 & 340.

From the table above, it is clear that the assessments fluctuated heavily.

20 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 236.

21 Ibid, pp. 339-340.

22 Ibid.

The following table shows the classification of Purnea assessments into khalsa and jagir lands[23] excluding 'abwabs' levied by the Provincial Government :—

Table 4

Year	Revenue from Khalsa lands in Rs.	Revenue from Jagir lands in Rs.	Total in Rs.
1722	98,664	1,80,166	2,78,830
1739	2,14,854	1,29,374	3,44,228

Sources: (1) Based on Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 250.

(2) Table No. 3.

It appears that revenue from jagir lands was quite substantial.

As has been said, Murshid Quli started the levy of abwab on the standard assessment. The following statement shows the levy of abwab from time to time by the Provincial Viceroys[24] :—

Table 5

Gross Assessment and Abwab in Purnea

Year	Standard Assessment in Rs.	Abwab in Rs.	Total in Rs.
1722	2,78,820	N. A.	—
1739	3,44,228	2,17,629	5,61,857
1757	3,44,229	3,17,098	6,61,327
1763	—	—	21,09,414

Sources : Based on the Fifth Report, vol. II, pp. 251 and 337.

23 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 250.

24 Ibid, pp. 251 & 337.

The preceding three tables indicate that the assessment of Purnea was the lowest in 1772. It is also clear that the levy of abwabs or cesses started by Murshid Quli Khan was increased by Shujauddin Khan in 1739 and further by Aliverdi Khan which increased the abwab to Rs. 3,17,098. Nothing can be said definitely about the imposition of abwabs by Mir Kasim. His assessment of the hidden sources increased the figure to Rs. 21,09,415, the highest that Purnea was ever assessed. But it is difficult to say what amount of these assessments found their way to the treasury at Murshidabad.

According to Hunter, the powerful military chiefs of Purnea must have opposed 'khasnavisi', a fee paid by the zamindars to the officers and the clerks of the treasury which was levied at Rs. 2,373. The second abwab was 'zar mathout' which consisted of 'nazar punyah', i.e. presents exacted from landlords at the time of the annual settlements; 'bhai khilat', a fee taken from zamindars for the dresses of honour that the Nawab bestowed on them every year at the time of punyah[25]; 'pushtbandi', a charge for construction of embankments in the vicinity of Murshidabad; and 'rasum nazarat', a commission of 10 annas in every thousand rupees lavied by the commander of the treasury guards at Murshidabad on all revenue remittances. The third was the 'faujdari abwab'. It was the cause of much ill-feeling between the faujdars of Purnea and the nawabs of Murshidabad. Hunter is of opinion that it was never levied. It was an additional assessment of Rs. 2,83,027 on the revenue portion of the estate which was extended northward during the administration of Saif Khan. The 'chouth maratha' levied by Aliverdi Khan amounting to Rs. 24,018 was never paid by Purnea nawabs.[26] The figures of assessment should not lead one to believe that these were also necessarily realised in full by the Murshidabad Government.

After we have got an idea of the assessment of Purnea during the period 1722 to 1765, let us turn to find out what amount the faujdars collected from the district.

25 A ceremony for inaugurating the revenue collection of the year.

26 W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, vol. XV, p. 388.

In spite of Saif Khan's conquest after 1722 and extension of the area of jurisdiction towards the west and the north, 'the names, numbers, and valuation of farms, assessed for the ancient crown rent, underwent no alteration'.[27] Saif Khan never submitted any account of the increase in revenue arising out of agricultural improvement or the extension of jurisidiction by conquests.[28] He used to realise a sum of rupees eighteen lakhs from the district and this continued even during the succeeding administratian of Saiyed Ahmad Khan who ruled Purnea upto 1756.[29] Only a few abwabs were added to the standard assessment.[30] The translator of 'Sair-Mutakharin' says that Saiyad Ahmad Khan collected a sum of Rs. 58,00,000 per year.[31] He was assured by the writers of Saiyad Ahmad's Treasury about this sum. When Saif Khan conquered pargana Dharmpur, the established assessment of which was Rs. 3,55,773 no account of it was taken by the Murshidabad Government nor did Saif Khan submit any account of his conquered territory in the north. After Saif Khan's conquest of Dharmpur a sum of Rs. 40,000 was deducted in the accounts of the Provincial Treasury from the assessment papers of Bihar and nothing was added to Bengal. Mir Kasim's investigations in 1761 conclusively proved that the gross income of Purnea was Rs. 21,09,415 and right from Saif Khan to Shaukat Jung, nobody ever paid that sum to the Provincial Treasury.[32] In the time of Aliverdi Khan the Province of Purnea paid something less than four lakhs of rupees a year.[33] If we accept Raymond's (translator of Sair Mutakharin) figures to be correct, huge savings were made by the faujdars of Purnea. But even if we discount his figures, there is no doubt that the rental of the Purnea faujdars was several times more than the revenue paid by them. The following table gives an

27 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 336.

28 Ibid, p. 335.

29 Ibid, p. 336.

30 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 336-

31 Sair-Mutakharin, vol. II, p. 137 (foot note).

32 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 337.

33 Letter Copy Book of the Resident at the Durbar at Murshidabad, 1769-1770 (Enclosure to Becher's Letter, dated the 25th September 1769), p. XXV.

idea of the difference between the revenue assessment and the rental of the Purnea faujdars between 1772 and 1757 :—

Table 6

The difference in Revenue and rental of Purnea

Year	Revenue assessment in Rs.	Rental in Rs.	Difference in Rs.
1772	2,78,830	18,00,000	15,21,170
1728	2,78,490	18,00,000	15,21,060
1739	3,44,288	18,00.000	14,55,712
1756	3,44,288	18,00,000	14,55,712
1757	6,61,327	18,00,000	11,38,673

Sources:—Based on (1) Table No. 3.

(2) Sair-Mutakharin, vol. II, p. 137 (footnote).

But if we accept Mir Kasim's figure of Rs. 21,00,000 to be the rental, the difference of Rs. 3,00,000 may further be added to the income of the faujdars. After the unquiet times of Plassey, it is difficult to say what amount was actually collected by Mir Kasim. Mir Kasim's investigations also revealed that zamindars earned huge income from 'sair duties'. There were several 'gunjes' in Purnea—Alamgunj, Maharajgunj, Dewangunj and others. The income from these was appropriated by the faujdars and no part of it was transmitted to Murshidabad Treasury. Thus apart from the rentals the faujdars had income fiom 'sair duties'. We are not taking note of any 'abwabs' which they might have imposed. Excluding the abwabs also, as we have seen, there was a good deal of difference between the revenue assessment and the rents realised.

For the purpose of rent collection, the entire district was divided into parganas or fiscal units. The revenue farmers were appointed by the fauj-

dars for collection as would be clear from the following account of Ghulam Hussain Khan, the author of Sair-Mutakharin, who was for several years in in the court of Saiyad Ahmad Khan till 1756 :

> There was a certain district called Seripur,[34] the rent of which was fixed at a one hundred and eighty and some thousand rupees; and he[35] conceived without any application from me, and even without my knowledge, the design of bestowing the collection of that revenue upon me.[36]

For this Gulam Hossain was to get seven thousand rupees a year over and above the presents and 'nazarans' on different occasions and this was not to be paid from the Government treasury but by the under renter who was appointed by Gulam Hossain.[37] This gives us an idea of the extra collections made from the raiyats. For collection of a revenue of Rs. 1,80,000 the revenue farmer was to get Rs. 7,000 as commission and presents etc. besides this amount, from the under renters. We may well imagine what amount the under renters must have realised from the tenants. There were hereditary zamindars in the district but notwithstanding that the district used to be leased out to influential persons who collected revenue from the zamindars which is indicated from the following account :

> his[38] credit in the province[39] knew no bounds, having been for a length of time strictly connected with Government as lessee of the district[40] of Tajpur[41] Seripur, Gundwara[42] and Karangola[43] in which station he had acquired both riches and character. The farmers of revenue, as

34 Sripur Pargana of Purnea.
35 Saiyad Ahmad Khan, Faujdar of Purnea.
36 Sair-Mutakharin, vol. II, p. 140.
37 Ibid.
38 Achal Singh's.
39 Purnea
40 Pargana
41 Tajpur
42 Gondwara
43 Karanagola

well as all the military commanders, had connections with him so early as the first year of Saiyad Ahmad Khan's administration.[44]

The above account refers to the period when Mir Jafar became the Nawab in 1757, and indicates that there were lessees and revenue farmers in the district. Achal Singh was a lessee of Tajpur and other parganas but there were hereditary zamindars as well in the district. The ex-proprietor of the Khagra estate in Kishangunj sub-division of Purnea, is a descendant of the zamindar of Surjapur pargana and this estate has been their property from 1545 by the grant of a sanad.[45] Pargana Kumaripur was the property of Raja Ramchandra Roy which was given to him by Saif Khan.[46] The estates of Asja and Teera Khardah were the property of Banaili family from 1751 and formerly these belonged to Purnea Raja Ramchandra Narayan Roy.[47] During the last days of Mughal rule, there were some 15 zamindars in Purnea[48] The Fifth Report indicates that in Purnea there were as many zamindars as there were parganas to be found in its jurisdiction.[49] Thus it would be wrong to say that there were no zamindars in Purnea. Nawab Sayad Ahmad Khan punished Md. Jalil, a zamindar of Purnea for his rebellious attitude and confiscated his zamindari,[50] but in 1756 this was restored to the family. All these accounts indicate that a class of zamindars existed in Purnea before 1765.

Shaukat Jang, the faujdar of Purnea refused to obey Sirajuddoula when the latter desired him to give delivery of possession of Birnagar and Gondwara Parganas of Purnea to Rasbehari, brother of Raja Durlabh Ram.[51] As a result of this disobedience, there was war between Sirajuddoula and Shaukat Jang in which the latter was killed. Saif Khan never went to Murshidabad to

44 Sair-Mutakharin, vol. II, pp. 250-251.
45 Bengal District Gazetteer, Purnea (1911), p. 194.
46 Buchanan, An Account of the District of Purnea, p. 479.
47 Ibid, p. 493.
48 N. K. Sinha, The Economic History of Bengal, vol. II, p. 17.
49 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 335.
50 Sair-Mutakharin, vol. II, p. 142.
51 Ibid, p. 204.

meet Aliverdi though the latter very much wished it and no action could be taken against Saif Khan for not paying due regard to the wishes of the Subahdar. The simple reason was that Aliverdi wanted to avoid any bad relationship with Saif Khan, grand-son of Umedul Mulk Amir Khan, Viceroy of Kabul, and a glorious Lord of seven thousand horses. 'To Saiyad Ahmad Khan Purnea has been given in full sovereignty', wrote Sirajuddoula to Aliverdi Khan.[52] Thus in the pre-Plassey period, we find that faujdars beginning from Saif Khan to Shaukat Jang, were all connected by ties of friendship or kinship with the nawabs of Bengal and naturally therefore, Purnea faujdars at times ignored the nawab or the latter did not like to interfere in their affairs lest it gave rise to family troubles or intrigues and the affairs of the faujdary were looked after more or less as private affair.

As regards the system of revenue prevalent one may conclude that standard assessment of Akbar was the guiding principle, but afterwards cesses were levied by the Provincial Government on the standard assessment details of which have already been given. In 1757 the standard assessment and the abwab in Purnea were almost equal as indicated earlier. The zamindars, kanungoes, patwaries and mandals all participated in the collection and administration of land revenue with the faujdar at the helm of affairs. In Purnea, 'the financial operations of the state in discovering the genuine collections made throughout the country, descended no further than the faujdar.'[53] As Purnea was a faujdari district, the zamindars were under the faujdar and it was enough to check the account of income of the faujdars which they received from the zamindars. What the zamindars realised from the tenants, was never the subject-matter of enquiry before the investigations made by Mir Kasim in 1761. Thus, we have seen above, the exchequer was always deprived of the increase in revenue on account of improvement in the country or extension of territorial jurisdiction.

The one fact that strikes us here is that on the eve of the Diwani the conditions regarding revenue assessments and collections had become unsettled.

52 Sair-Mutakharin, vol. II, p. 96.

53 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 339.

Both the central and provincial governments had become weak and worn out. The Company at this time was the defacto sovereign of Bengal.

As the officers of the Company were all foreigners and at this stage it was their policy to conciliate the people to their newly established government, they decided not to disturb the existing system of revenue administration for the time being. But the East India Company being a commercial concern, was very particular in the realisation of revenue even when occasions warranted remissons. On the accession to Diwani, the authorities of the Company found that as a matter of fact, the old system of revenue administration was not working properly. They were also out for political domination of the country and as such it was nesessary for them to evolve a system of revenue as well as a system of government suited to the larger interests of the Company. This could not be done all at once and so the authorities decided in favour of a policy of wait and watch and then proceed cautiously on experiments. They tried several methods of revenue collections and ultimately because of the experiences gained in course of years, they headed towards permanency of settlement.

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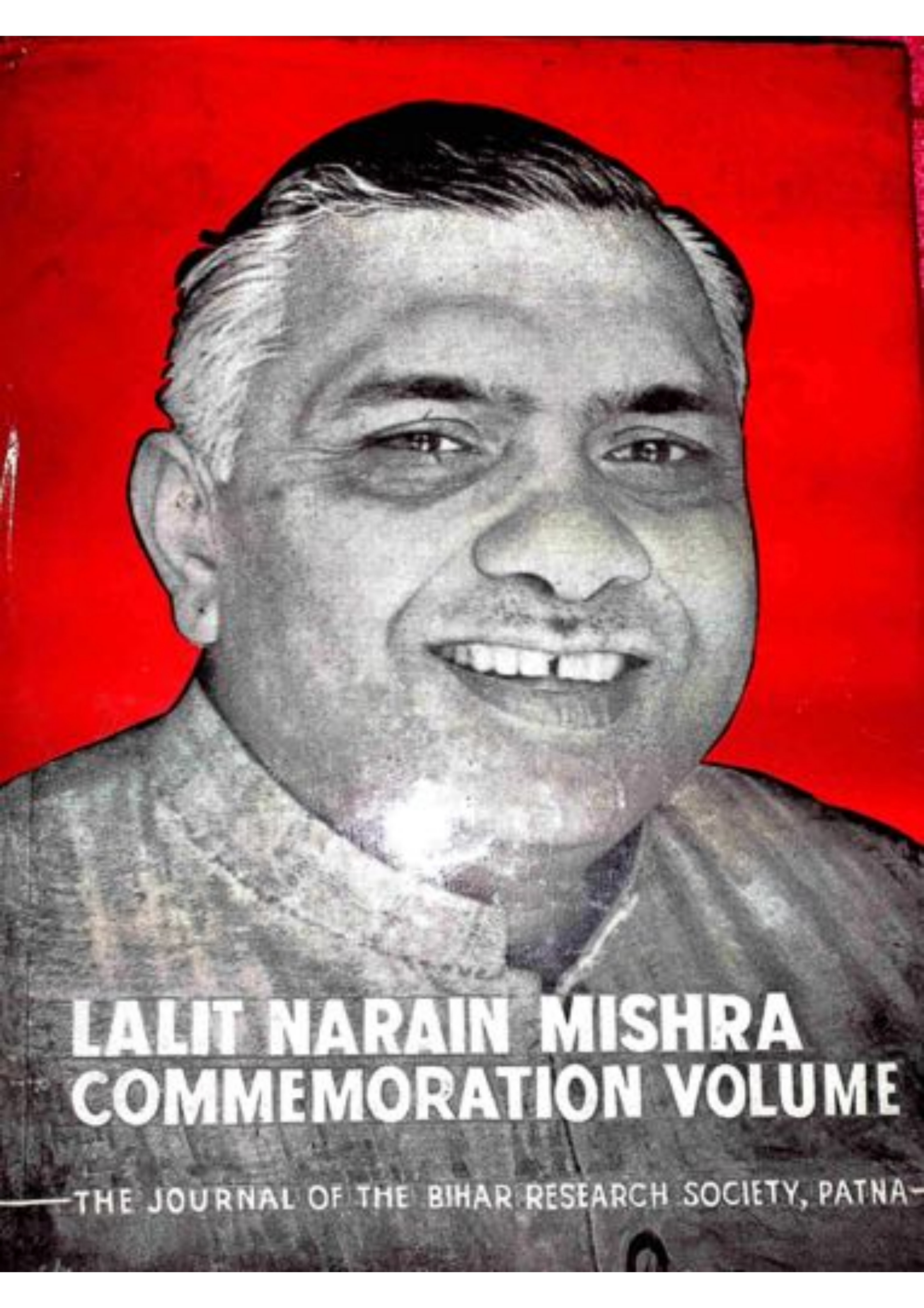
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